

HOW DO WE GET THE RESEARCH POLICY-MAKERS NEED IN HIV AND STIs?

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POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH?

Conducting research that can be used directly to inform, improve and monitor government policy has long been a challenge for both policy-makers and researchers.

Policy relevant research is responsive to the changing research and political landscape, risks and opportunities, generates solutions, guides investment, and most importantly aligns with and supports the delivery of current government strategic goals.

A REVISED APPROACH

In 2013, the Ministry changed its approach to purchasing research in HIV, sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and viral hepatitis by commissioning a 5-year research program for HIV, STIs and viral hepatitis through a single provider. Using this approach the Ministry describe and enumerate a comprehensive range of deliverables to support policy and strategy directions.

This new approach contrasts with the previous model of funding a range of specific project requests from researchers under individual contracts.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS: A ONE-STOP SHOP

The research program is more than a collection of research projects funded through a single contract.

The research program provides a coherent and integrated portfolio of:

- high quality, policy-relevant research
- strategic advice
- research capacity building activities; and
- targeted communications

to support the NSW population health response to HIV, STIs and viral hepatitis.

DELIVERING EFFICIENCY, MAINTAINING FLEXIBILITY

The content and specifics of the deliverables are tailored annually through a work plan. This encourages efficiency in the allocation and use of available funding.

Development of the annual work plan is an iterative and consultative process, involving policy-makers, researchers and stakeholders. The focus is on identifying research and practice gaps that are important for achieving the goals and targets of the NSW Strategies for HIV, STIs and viral hepatitis.

The annual work plan is also a living document, providing the flexibility needed to support current and emerging policy needs for NSW Health in responding to HIV, STIs and viral hepatitis.

PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

The consultation process for the first annual work plan, brought together major stakeholders from academia, practice and policy to identify evidence gaps and prioritise the top research and evidence needs across the continuum of prevention, testing and treatment/management. The priorities were then mapped against the NSW Strategies to ensure policy relevance.

There was an iterative process, between the researchers and the Ministry, to refine the priorities into specific research projects within an achievable work plan and the identified budget.

Continued engagement and involvement of the partners in the NSW response, including clinicians, researchers, non-government organisations and policy-makers, remains a critical component of the program. The research activities are led by the researchers, however, each project has a steering committee. Opportunities to be involved in the design, conduct and review of research activities are made available to stakeholders as a principle of the program.

BENEFITS

Streamlined investment: Investment has been largely streamlined, supporting improved management and efficiency in purchasing by NSW Health. The range of research services and activities are managed under a single contract and budget, with a single point of contact.

Direct support for NSW Strategies: The work plan includes a breadth and depth of projects that directly support Strategy priority areas of prevention, testing and treatment and care and include policy, program and practice development, implementation and monitoring.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of the research program and negotiation of the first annual work plan provide valuable lessons for policy makers, the community and researchers to ensure that the research that is commissioned and conducted is mutually beneficial and can be translated directly to policy and practice.



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